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# Childcare still largest barrier to female participation

Media Release

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**i Source:**

[Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation, Australia, 2020-21 financial year](#)

Caring for children remains the largest barrier to female participation in the labour force, according to data released today by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

In 2020-21, there were 2.8 million people who did not work full-time and who either wanted a job (1.7 million people) or were working part-time and wanted to increase their working hours (1.1 million people).

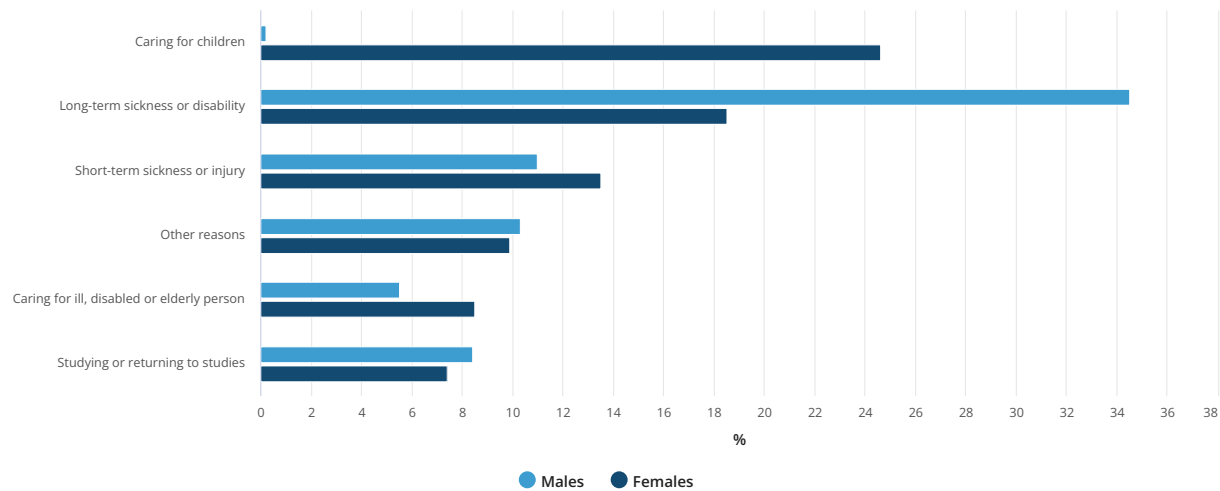
While most of these people were also available for work, around one in seven (14 per cent) or 385,700 people were not available to work or work more hours within four weeks. Around two-thirds of these people were women (65 per cent or 250,000 people).

Bjorn Jarvis, head of labour statistics at the ABS, said: "In 2020-21, there were 250,000 women who wanted a job or to work more hours but were unavailable, of whom 61,600 (25 per cent) indicated that caring for children was the main barrier. It was highest for women with children under 15, with more than half (56 per cent) reporting this as their main barrier to work or working more hours."

"For men, the main barrier to participation continued to be long-term sickness or disability (35 per cent)."

"While female participation in the labour force is at record high levels, this data shows that childcare remains the key for increasing the opportunities for women to participate in the labour market," Mr Jarvis said.

## Main reason not available to start a job or more hours

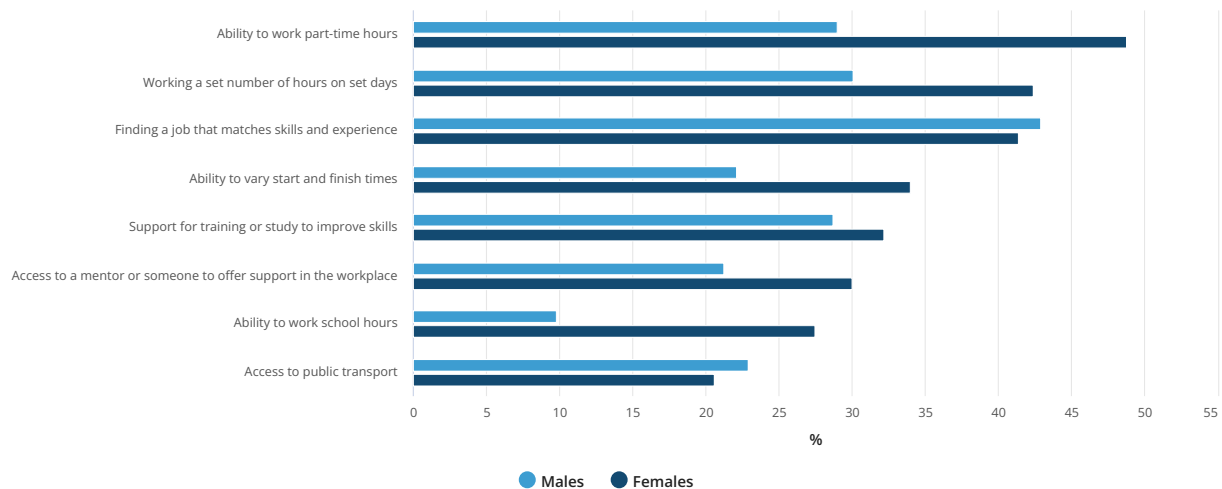


## Incentives

In addition to information on barriers, the ABS also released information on incentives that would influence people to join or increase their participation in the labour force.

“For women, the most important incentive to work or work more hours was the ability to work part-time hours (49 per cent), while for men it was finding a job that matched their skills and experience (43 per cent),” Mr Jarvis said.

## Incentives to join or increase participation in the labour force



"Almost two out of every three women with children under 15 (65 per cent) indicated that the most important incentive to return to work or work more hours would be the ability to work part-time, followed by the ability to work during school hours (61 per cent). If this and other important conditions were met, 42 per cent of them would likely accept a suitable job as soon as possible," Mr Jarvis said.

"This data provides insights into barriers and incentives that could be addressed to encourage future participation in the workforce, for governments and businesses."

### People with a long-term health condition

In 2020-21, there were 1.5 million people who had a long-term health condition who wanted a job or to increase their working hours (excluding people aged 75 years and over, retirees and those permanently unable to work).

281,000 (19 per cent) were unavailable to work or work more hours, of whom a third (32 per cent) indicated that their health condition was the main barrier. Two-thirds indicated a

different barrier as the main reason they were not available, with a short-term sickness of injury (16 per cent) and caring for children (14 per cent) being the two most common.

On 8 September 2022, the Australian Government announced additional funding for the Australian Bureau of Statistics to measure barriers and incentives to labour force participation more frequently. With this funding, the ABS will now release data on barriers and incentives every year (rather than every two years), with a range of key measures released on a quarterly basis. The ABS is also partnering across the Australian Public Service to identify other data that can provide information on how different groups of people participate in the labour market.

## Media notes

- This data was collected between July 2020 and June 2021 and reflects the labour market conditions at that time, when the pandemic was likely to influence the reasons people were not working or could not work.
- Related data can also be found in the annual [Participation, Job Search and Mobility \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/latest-release\)](#) topic, which is collected in conjunction with the Labour Force Survey every February (see [Potential workers \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/potential-workers/latest-release\)](#) and [Underemployed workers \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/underemployed-workers/latest-release\)](#)).
- For more information on the Government funding announcement, refer to the press release - [Funding the Australian Bureau of Statistics to better collect data on disadvantage \(https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/andrew-leigh-2022/media-releases/funding-australian-bureau-statistics-better-collect-data\)](#).
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